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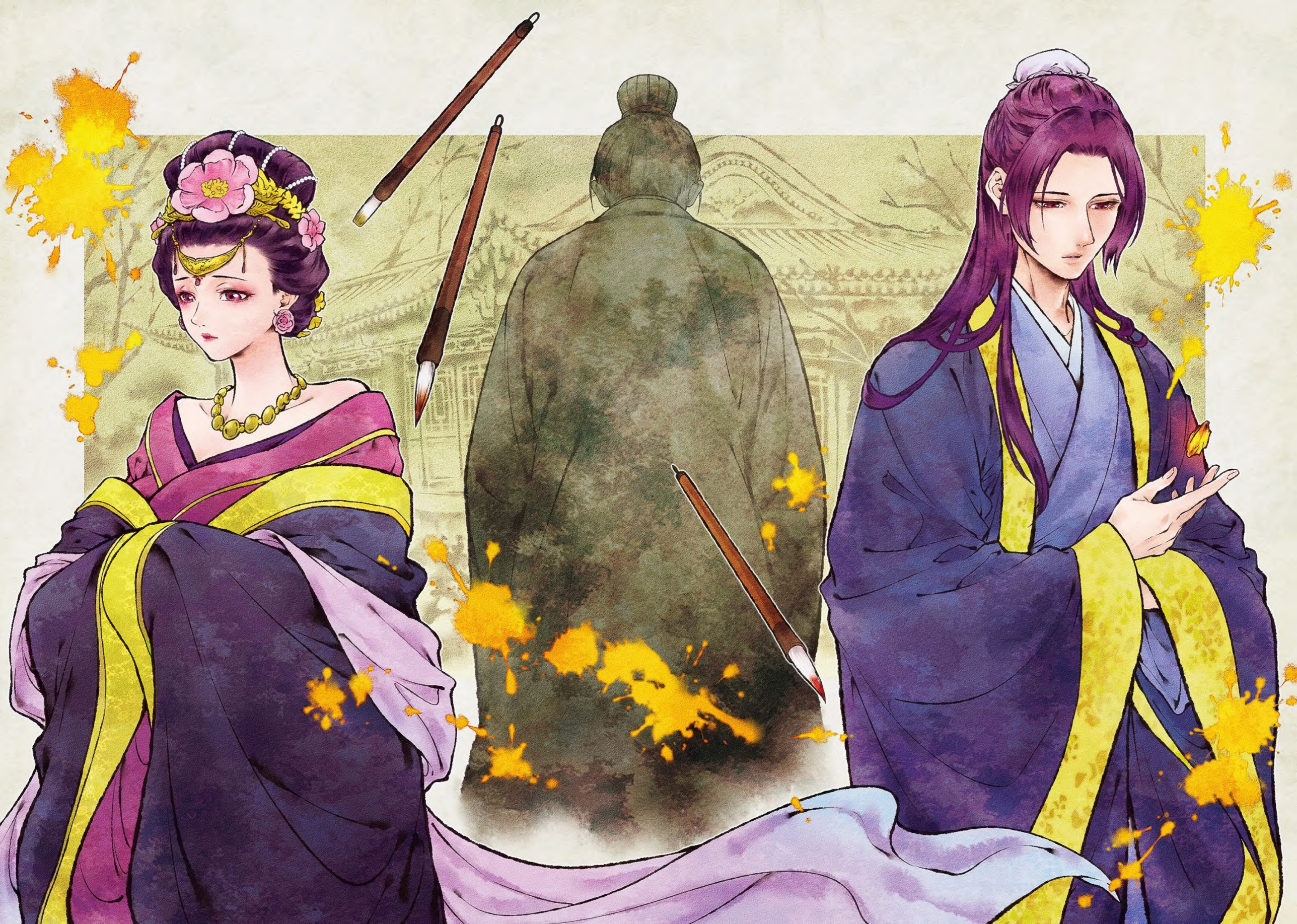

The Apothecary Diaries

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MAY WE PLEASE ...

...GO THROUGH THE SHRINE ONE MORE TIME?

Chapter 54 The Shrine of Choosing ②

OR DO YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF SOMEHOW QUALIFIED, YOUNG LADY?

THE ONLY WOMEN TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ALONG ON THIS JOURNEY THROUGH THE SHRINE BEFORE...

...WERE PRIN-CESSES AND CON-SORTS.

I GAVE YOU LEAVE TO JOIN US LAST TIME AS ONE OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S CHOSEN ATTENDANTS...

...BUT ALLOWING SOMEONE WITH NO RELATION TO THE IMPERIAL LINE TO HAVE A SAY ON THE SELECTION OF THE DOORS IS ANOTHER MATTER ENTIRELY.

CON-VINCING LAKAN WILL BE NO MEAN FEAT, I FEAR...

...BUT YOU WOULD HAVE NO OBJEC-TIONS THEN, CORRECT?

THEN I SHALL JUST HAVE TO TAKE HER AS A CONSORT!

PLEASE REFRAIN FROM SUCH JESTS, YOUR MAJ-ESTY!

!

JUST THINK OF THE LOOKS YOU'D GET FROM YOUR OTHER CONSORTS!

THIS RELAXED SIDE IS SOMEWHAT DIFFER-ENT...

...FROM THE ONE WE SEE AT THE JADE PALACE.

HA! HA! HA!

TRUE ENOUGH!

...WILL AROUSE THE EMPEROR'S PASSIONS.

NOTHING LESS THAN A BUST OF 90 CENTI-METERS...

ARE YOU SURE?

IN THAT CASE...

...YOU TAKE THE GIRL THROUGH IN MY STEAD.

...AND I MYSELF AM VERY KEEN TO KNOW WHAT THAT IS.

SHE APPEARS TO HAVE A THEORY SHE'S KEEN TO TEST...

SIGH...

.....AS YOU WISH, SIRE.

WHAT AN ODDLY MERCURIAL FELLOW, OUR EMPEROR.

ORDINARILY, IT WOULD BE HIGHLY IMPROPER FOR JINSHI...

...TO WALK IN FRONT OF THE EMPEROR WHEN HE ISN'T EVEN SERVING AS A GUIDE...

...TO SAY NOTHING OF CHOOSING DOORS IN THIS IMPERIAL RITE OF PASSAGE.

CREEEAK

不得穿过红门

THE BLUE ONE.

不得穿过红门

WHICH DOOR SHOULD WE PICK?

CREAK

不得穿过黑门

THE WHITE DOOR.

NOW WHICH?

THE CHOICES ALREADY DIFFER FROM MINE.

HMM.

THIS IS THE TENTH ROOM.

WE DIDN'T GET THIS FAR LAST TIME.

汝得选
择红门

"THOU SHALT CHOOSE THE RED DOOR."

A WHITE, A BLACK, AND A GREEN DOOR.

WHICH MEANS ...

BUT THERE'S NO RED DOOR HERE.

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?

YOUR ANSWER LIES BEYOND THE GREEN DOOR.

VERY WELL.

CREAK

WE...

WE'RE ...!

YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE CORRECT PATH.

CONGRAT-ULATIONS.

WHEN NONE COULD WORK OUT THE TRUE PATH...

...A PRO-SPECTIVE RULER WAS PERMITTED TO TRY AGAIN...

...WITH A CONSORT WHO COULD PICK HER WAY CORRECTLY THROUGH THE SHRINE AT HIS SIDE.

IN OLDEN TIMES, IT WAS THE DUTY OF HE WHO HAD EARNED THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BLESSING TO TAKE UP THE CROWN...

...AND ADDRESS THE PEOPLE FROM ATOP THE ROOF OF THIS SHRINE...

...WHICH WAS THEN THE HIGHEST POINT IN THE CITY.

LAY OFF, OLD MAN.

YOU GOADED ME IN THE FIRST PLACE.

BUT AS WE CAN SEE, IT WAS SOMEONE ELSE ENTIRELY WHO COMPLETED THE RITE THIS TIME.

...BY SOMEONE OF THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BLOOD-LINE.

NATURALLY, THIS IS TO BE ACCOM-PLISHED...

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD ASK HER INSTEAD.

NEVER MIND THAT. I DEMAND AN EXPLA-NATION.

LEAVING ALL THE HARD STUFF TO ME, EH?

YOU HEARD THE MAN!

不得穿过红门

GREEN 88

RED 83

BLUE 07

VERY WELL. I SHALL EXPLAIN MY CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE DOORS.

IN THE FIRST ROOM...

...THERE WAS A BLUE, A RED, AND A GREEN DOOR, ALONG WITH A SIGN THAT READ, "DO NOT PASS THROUGH THE RED DOOR."

THUS, I CHOSE THE BLUE ONE.

THE GREEN DOOR SHOULD'VE ALSO BEEN A VALID OPTION, GOING BY THE SIGN.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE...

...WHO CANNOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE COLORS RED AND GREEN.

THERE ARE?

YES.

...THEY'D PICK THE DOOR THEY KNEW FOR A FACT WAS NOT RED.

AND BECAUSE THEY CANNOT...

SO BECAUSE THEY COULD CORRECTLY IDENTIFY THE WHITE AND THE BLACK DOORS...

...THEY'D HAVE PICKED THE GREEN DOOR IN THE LAST ROOM?

EXACTLY.

IF SOMEONE WAS UNABLE TO TELL THE BLACK AND RED DOORS APART, THEY WOULD PICK THE WHITE ONE.

THE SAME GOES FOR THE NEXT ROOM.

AT FIRST GLANCE, EACH RIDDLE APPEARS TO HAVE TWO CORRECT ANSWERS...

...BUT IN TRUTH, THERE IS ONLY ONE.

I BELIEVE THE FINAL DOOR WAS MADE GREEN...

...BASED ON THE KNOWL-EDGE THAT THOSE WHO HAD REACHED THE LAST ROOM...

...WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RED AND GREEN.

...SO WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

THE PROOF THAT ONE IS BOTH A CHILD OF THE QUEEN MOTHER AND THE SHRINE'S CHOSEN...

...IS THAT THEY ARE COLOR-BLIND.

THE CONDITION AFFLICTS MEN MORE THAN WOMEN, ACCORDING TO PA.

ONE IN EVERY TEN MEN ARE BORN THIS WAY IN THE WEST.

WHILE IT MAY IMPACT THEIR DAILY LIVES...

...THEY GRADUALLY LEARN HOW TO COPE WITH IT, AND THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM ARE NONE THE WISER.

RED

GREEN

IT'S RARE IN OUR COUNTRY ...

...BUT I'M TOLD THAT SOME PEOPLE IN THE WEST...

...ARE BORN WITH THE INABILITY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN RED AND GREEN.

...THE QUEEN MOTHER WAS ABLE TO SEE FAR AND WIDE IN THE DARK, RIGHT?

ACCORDING TO THE FOUNDING LEGEND...

I HAVEN'T INVESTIGATED THIS MYSELF ...

...BUT I HAVE HEARD THOSE WHO HAVE TROUBLE MAKING OUT COLORS ...

...CAN SEE BETTER IN THE DARK BECAUSE OF IT.

IF NONE IN LINE FOR THE THRONE COULD COMPLETE THIS RITE OF PASSAGE ...

...THEN HE WHO WISHED TO RULE WOULD NEED TO TAKE A CONSORT OF WESTERN BLOOD LIKE THAT OF THE QUEEN MOTHER.

THAT MUST BE WHY CONSORTS ARE GIVEN LEAVE TO ENTER.

WHEN TRAITS THAT ADVERSELY IMPACT DAILY LIFE ARE PASSED FROM PARENTS TO CHILDREN...

...THE CHILDREN ALSO OFTEN INHERIT THEIR PARENTS' EXCEP-TIONAL QUALITIES.

I THINK PERHAPS THAT IS THE REASON THIS SHRINE WAS BUILT TO CHOOSE THE NEXT RULER.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE DIFFICULT FOR HER AND HER PEOPLE TO MIGRATE TO A NEW PLACE...

...WHILE BEING COLOR-BLIND.

THE LEGEND SAYS THE QUEEN MOTHER CAME FROM A FARAWAY LAND.

...BUT SHE LIKELY MARRIED THE CHIEF OF THIS LAND.

IN THE STORY, THE QUEEN MOTHER HAD NO HUSBAND...

THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY THIS COUNTRY PRIORITIZES THE MALE LINE OF SUCCESSION.

IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR A LOCAL LEADER TO TAKE A FOREIGNER AS HIS WIFE...

...TO HELP DILUTE A BLOODLINE THAT HAD BECOME CONCENTRATED THROUGH GENERATIONS OF INTERMARRIAGE.

HOWEVER, THE QUEEN MOTHER AND HER RETAINERS WERE AGAINST THIS.

THUS, THEY DEVISED A MEANS TO ENSURE THAT HER BLOODLINE...

...WOULD CONTINUE TO FLOW THROUGH THE LEADERS OF THE NATION—

THIS SHRINE.

...AND ALL THAT REMAINED WAS THE TALE OF THE QUEEN MOTHER, NOW REGARDED AS FACT.

EVENTUALLY, THOSE WHO HAD BEEN PRESENT AT THE TIME TURNED TO DUST...

BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THEIR FOREIGN ARTS...

...HER PEOPLE BECAME THE HEART OF THE POPULATION, BEQUEATHING THEIR SKILLS THROUGH THE GENERATIONS.

WHAT A PEACEFUL AND PATIENT WAY TO USURP A THRONE.

IN THE PROCESS, THEY CRAFTED THE LEGEND OF THE QUEEN MOTHER...

...AND PASSED IT DOWN ORALLY, WHERE THE TRUTH GENTLY GREW BENT.

...I WOULD NEVER GO SO FAR AS TO ACTUALLY SAY ALL THAT OUT LOUD.

BUT...

MY MOTHER WAS NOT RELATED TO THE EMPEROR.

NOR MY GRAND-MOTHER, THE EM-PRESS.

SO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BLOOD DOES NOT FLOW THROUGH MY VEINS?

SHAKE

SHAKE

...IN WHICH IT IS NOT PASSED ALONG TO THE CHILD.

WHILE A PARENT MAY HAVE THAT TRAIT, THERE ARE CASES...

THE SHRINE MERELY CHECKS WHETHER ONE IS COLOR-BLIND.

IT WOULD BE A DIFFERENT STORY IF THE EMPEROR'S MOTHER HAD BEEN UNFAITHFUL ...

...BUT THERE'S NO WAY OF REALLY KNOWING.

MOREOVER, WHEN A BLOODLINE GROWS TOO CONCENTRATED, IT HAS THE ADVERSE EFFECT OF WEAKENING THE BODY.

IN ADDITION TO THE LATE EMPEROR'S SIBLINGS DYING IN AN EPIDEMIC...

...MANY OF HIS OTHER RELATIONS WERE ALSO FELLED BY DISEASE.

PERHAPS THIS WAS THE COST...

...OF SELECTIVELY PRIORITIZING THE BLOOD-LINE TO BE CHOSEN BY THE SHRINE.

I'M IMPRESSED A GIRL AS YOUNG AS YOURSELF WAS ABLE TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY.

CLAP ぱち

CLAP ぱち

CLAP ぱち

I CAN'T IMAGINE ...

...SHE'D HAVE THOUGHT TO BUILD THIS SHRINE TO ENSURE HER BLOODLINE IF SHE HADN'T BEEN.

...BECAUSE SHE WAS EXTRAORDINARILY INTELLIGENT.

IT IS SAID THAT THE QUEEN MOTHER CAME TO RULE THIS LAND...

HUNH?

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER ADDING THIS LASS TO YOUR HAREM, AFTER ALL.

HA! HA! HA!

... BETTER WATCH HIS MOUTH.

THIS OLD COOT ...

THERE ARE MANY WHO WOULD NOT LOOK KINDLY UPON THAT.

NOW THERE'S A THOUGHT!

I'D PREFER NOT TO COUNT LAKAN AMONG MY ENEMIES, THOUGH.

HOW RUDE...

BESIDES WHICH, SHE NEEDS TO FILL OUT ANOTHER 15 CENTIMETERS OR SO IN THE CHEST TO BE MORE TO MY LIKING!

?

STARE

PLEASE DO TAKE THE UTMOST CARE.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME.

I AM AWARE, YOUR MAJESTY.

...IT IS YOU WHO MUST TAKE CARE.

WELL ...

...WHAT-EVER.

• • • • • •

I'M STARTING TO THINK HE'S MORE THAN SIMPLY A FAVORITE OF THE EMPEROR'S.

JUST WHO IS JINSHI?

...THAT I WOULD COME TO DEEPLY REGRET THIS A FEW DAYS LATER.

HOWEVER, I HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING AT THE TIME...

IGNO-RANCE IS BLISS AND ALL THAT.

Chapter 55

BOMP

BOMP

BOMP

BOMP

FLINCH

TOTTER

TOTTER

GRIP

FREEZE

TMP タッ

TMP タッ

OH!

MOTHER!

JANGLE

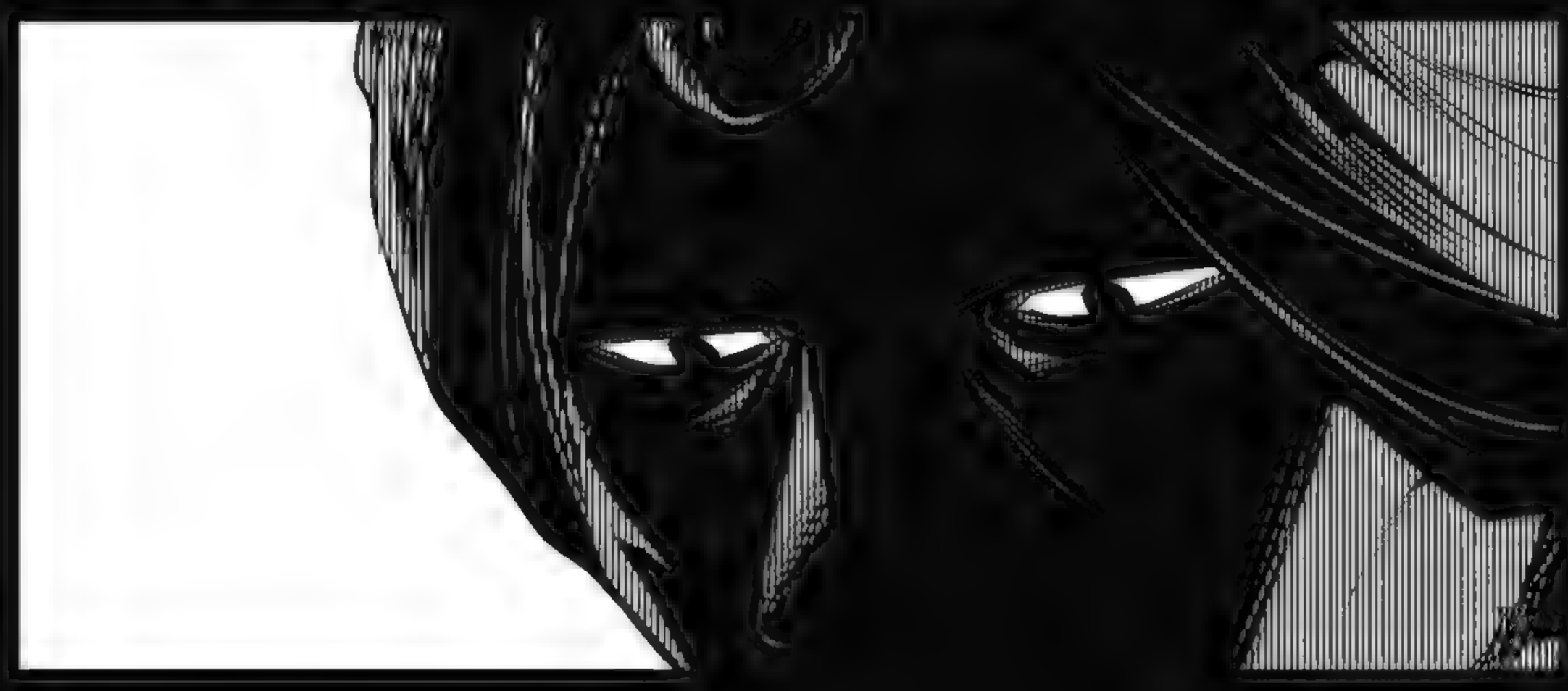
JANGLE

JANGLE

ZSH

JANGLE

SHE MUST BE VERY IMPORTANT.
BOW



LET'S RETURN TO YOUR ROOM.

COME, NOW.

FWIP

TRMBL

TRMBL

TRMBL

CHATTR

CHATTR

RAISE

I WONDER WHO THAT OLD MAN AND OLD WOMAN ARE.

WHY...

...IS MOTHER MAKING THAT FACE?

I CAN'T REALLY REMEM-BER.

PWAH!

GULP

I FEEL SICK.

THE OLD WOMAN IN THE DREAM WAS MY GRANDMOTHER, AND THE OLD MAN WAS MY FATHER.

THEY SAY SOMETHING BAD IS BOUND TO HAPPEN AFTER ONE HAS A BAD DREAM.

IS THAT ANYTHING MORE THAN SUPERSTI-TION?

...IS ACTUALLY MY OLDER BROTHER.

AND THE MAN I THOUGHT WAS MY FATHER...

...ONE MIGHT CALL AMBER OR BURNISHED YELLOW.

...IT WAS A STRIKINGLY BRIGHT COLOR...

...A STONE FELL FROM MY FATHER'S HAND.

THAT DAY...

I WONDER WHAT THAT STONE WAS.

DAWN WON'T BE BREAKING ANYTIME SOON.

FWOOSH

...I GUESS I'LL GET SOME SWINGS IN.

I'LL HAVE TO ASK SUIREN TO PREPARE A HOT BATH FOR ME LATER.

I CAN'T KEEP MY SECRET FOREVER.

EVEN THAT GIRL WHO'S IGNORANT ABOUT THE ODDEST THINGS...

...WILL PROBABLY FIGURE IT OUT SOON.

OR MAYBE SHE ALREADY KNOWS...

THAT'D CERTAINLY MAKE THINGS EASIER FOR ME.

SUIREN SHOULD BE COMING TO WAKE ME IN A BIT.

I'LL JUST GET A LITTLE MORE SLEEP ...

...TILL SHE DOES.

Chapter 55 The Empress Dowager

YES. I HOPE YOU'LL LEARN YOUR LESSON.

YOU REALLY MEAN IT? I CAN STAY HERE?

THESE WILL BE YOUR QUARTERS, STARTING TODAY.

THANK YOU SO MUCH!

I TOLD YOU IT'D BE POINT-LESS!

SHE'S STILL HUNTING FOR BUGS DESPITE THAT FIERCE SCOLDING SHE GOT!

BUT THIS GIRL!

NOW, NOW, YINGHUA. THAT'S A VERY UNKIND THING TO SAY.

BUT I HEAR THERE'S SOME STRANGE COURT LADY GOING AROUND CATCHING BUGS AND CACKLING.

OH, REALLY, NOW?

I HAVE REFRAINED FROM GATHERING LIZARD TAILS SINCE YOUR ESTEEMED SELF FAINTED DEAD AWAY THAT DAY, I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW.

...THAT'S WHAT SHE WAS COL-LECTING BEFORE?

...BUT I'D NEVER CACKLE WHILE CATCHING THEM.

SURE, I HAD TO CATCH A WHOLE BUNCH OF MOTHS FOR THAT JOB...

I HAVE DONE NO SUCH THING.

YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW SHISUI'S BEEN?
HEY, GIRLS!
DO ANY OF YOU KNOW WHERE SHISUI IS RIGHT NOW?
YOU KNOW HER. SHE'S THE ELUSIVE TYPE WHO POPS UP WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT HER.
XIAOLAN HAS STARTED USING MORE COMPLEX WORDS. MUST BE THOSE CLASSES...

I MEAN, SHE MUST BE SOME-WHERE...

YEAH ?!

THEY'RE BEING EVASIVE.

WHERE? TELL ME!

UMM, I THINK I MIGHT'VE SEEN HER?

MAIDS LIKE XIAOLAN ARE PRETTY RARE. NOT EVERYONE'S COMFORTABLE BEING OPEN WITH ANYONE AND EVERYONE.

?

MAYBE THEY'RE BEING CAUTIOUS SINCE THEY DON'T KNOW ME, AND I'M CLEARLY ATTACHED TO A CONSORT'S HOUSEHOLD.

OOH.

I'LL GIVE YOU THIS IF YOU TELL US WHAT YOU KNOW.

FWISH

...

...IS THAT...HIS PERFUME?!

I SHALL LEAVE THAT TO YOUR IMAGINATION.

...AFTER XING STRUCK ME.

JINSHI GAVE IT TO ME THE OTHER DAY...

I'D SAY THIS THING IS HARDLY SERVICEABLE AS A TOWEL, THOUGH.

BZZZZZ

BZZZZZ

I'M PRETTY SURE THIS IS WHERE I MET SHISUI BEFORE.

I GUESS SHE MUST BE FOND OF THIS NORTHERLY GROVE.

SO WILL YOU TELL US?

NOD NOD

IF ONLY I'D BROUGHT SOME OF THE MUGWORT OR FRESH PINE NEEDLES WE USE AT THE JADE PALACE...

I COULD HAVE BURNED THEM FOR MOSQUITO REPELLENT.

THE FLYING INSECTS ARE OUT IN FORCE. MUST BE SUMMER...

FOUR-O'CLOCK FLOWERS GROWING RAMPANT ...

SO YOU CAN FIND THEM HERE TOO...

NOT TO USE THE POWDER WITHIN FOR MAKEUP...

...BUT FOR SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY.

PLUCK

WHEN I WAS LITTLE, THE COURTESANS AND I WOULD GO OUT AND COLLECT THEIR SEEDS.

A POTION TO INDUCE MISCAR-RIAGE.

XING, WHO WAS TRYING TO BREW JUST THAT, WASN'T IN THE HABIT OF WEARING ANY PERFUME ON HER PERSON.

SHE'D BEEN TRYING TO STEAL CONSORT LIHUA'S POSITION ...

...SO IT'S NOT ODD THAT SHE WOULD AVOID FRAGRANCES THAT COULD POTENTIALLY ABORT A PREGNANCY.

BUT THAT VERY SAME WOMAN THEN TOOK TO BREWING AN ABORTIVE POTION WITH SUCH FERVOR THAT THE SMELL OF IT CLUNG TO HER LIKE PERFUME.

THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE ...

THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE CONSORT LIHUA IS PREGNANT AS WELL.

...CONSORT GYOKUYO ISN'T THE EMPEROR'S ONLY FAVORITE.

...THE SEEDS OF THE FOUR-O'CLOCK FLOWERS ARE BOILED WITH A MIXTURE OF THINGS LIKE LANTERN FLOWERS, TREE PEONY, BALSAM, GARDEN PEONY, AND QUICK-SILVER...

TO MAKE THE COURTESANS' BREW...

...ALL OF WHICH, SAVE FOR QUICKSILVER, CAN BE FOUND HERE AT THE INNER COURT.

BUT THAT WASN'T THE ONLY UNUSUAL THING ABOUT THAT INCIDENT.

...WERE ALL PURCHASED FROM AMONG THE WARES THE CARAVAN HAD FOR SALE.

HOWEVER, THE INGREDIENTS FOR XING'S POTION...

DID SOMEONE TEACH XING, A WOMAN WITH NO KNOWLEDGE OF MEDICINE, TO MAKE POISON?

AND THAT RAISES A QUESTION.

KRRHMM

...AT THE INNER COURT?

AND IS THAT PERSON STILL HERE...

RUSTLE

KREEEE

BOING

BOING

BOING

I'M SO GALLED TO HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN...

...FOR HER.

GOTCHA!

HOP

KREEEE

KREEEE

CR UN CH

BUUUUG!

OOPS.

I DON'T WANT TO HAVE A BUG STUCK ON MY HEAD FOREVER.

...GET OFF ME, ALREADY.

UH-HUH!

...WERE YOU OUT HUNTING FOR THOSE BUGS?

I'M SO SORRY ABOUT THAT, MAOMAO.

KABLOOSH

HM?

TROT

TROT

SIT

HMM ...?

DWEEE HEEE!

SHE SURE LOVES HER INSECTS.

NOW I WISH I HADN'T ASKED.

I KNOW THEY LOOK LIKE COCK-ROACHES, BUT THEY'RE A DIFFERENT SPECIES ENTIRELY, SO THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!

OH!

THIS INSECT IS ACTUALLY NATIVE TO AN ISLAND NATION TO THE EAST! IT MAKES SOUNDS BY VIBRATING ITS WINGS! I BET IT STOWED AWAY IN SOME TRADE GOODS THAT WERE BEING SHIPPED AND ESCAPED TO FREEDOM! I BET THEY CAN ONLY BE FOUND HERE, JUST LIKE THOSE MOTHS WE CAUGHT BEFORE!

NO
BLAB
NO
BLAB
NO
BLAB

KLAK

I SUPPOSE I WOULDN'T MIND SO MUCH IF WE WERE DISCUSSING MEDICINE.

AND! AND!

KLAK

KLAK

FEW PEOPLE CAN STRUT ABOUT THE INNER COURT WITH SUCH A LARGE ENTOURAGE.

THAT WOMAN DRESSED IN THE ELEGANT, COLORFUL ROBE AT THE CENTER OF THAT ONE...

...IS THE EMPRESS DOWAGER.

SHE'S SO YOUNG, YOU'D NEVER IMAGINE HER TO BE THE MOTHER OF OUR NEATLY MUSTACHIOED EMPEROR.

SHE HASN'T CHANGED A BIT SINCE LAST YEAR'S GARDEN BANQUET.

...WELL, I SUPPOSE YOU COULD CALL IT A CONDI-TIONED REFLEX.

...WHEN-EVER SOME-ONE OF HIGHER STANDING WALKS BY.

ONE OF THE VERY FIRST THINGS WE'RE TAUGHT IS TO KNEEL AND BOW OUR HEADS...

WHSPR

...UHH...

WHY ARE YOU HIDING?

WHY ARE YOU?

BEST BE MORE CAREFUL.

...BUT I TEND TO FORGET.

TECHNICALLY, I SHOULD BE DOING THAT AROUND JINSHI AND GAO SHUN AS WELL...

SHE IS?

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE SHE'S THE ONE WHO STARTED IT.

OOH!

I THINK THE CLINIC IS OVER THAT WAY.

PEOPLE SAY SHE'S A VERY COMPASSIONATE PERSON.

I'VE EVEN HEARD THAT SLAVERY WAS OUTLAWED AFTER SHE VENTURED THE SUGGESTION.

OHH.

AND IT'S STILL HERE TODAY BECAUSE OF HER.

IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, IT WAS ESTABLISHED BACK WHEN THE EMPRESS HAD LOTS OF POWER.

SO THAT'S WHAT BRINGS THE EMPRESS DOWAGER OUT OF HER WAY TO SUCH AN UNOFFICIAL PART OF THE INNER COURT.

THE SLAVE TRADE WAS JUST THAT—BUSINESS.

A BROAD SWATH OF ENTERPRISES WERE UNABLE TO RECOVER FOLLOWING THE ABOLITION.

THERE WAS ALSO THE QUESTION OF WHAT CONSTITUTED A SLAVE.

FROM A HUMANE STANDPOINT, DOING AWAY WITH SLAVERY WAS A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL REFORM.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IT HAD A MAJOR RIPPLING EFFECT IN SOCIETY.

IN FACT, THIS WAS THE VERY TOPIC THAT BROUGHT TOGETHER THE MADAMS OF THE PLEASURE DISTRICT FOR A GRIM-FACED DISCUSSION SOME YEARS EARLIER.

COURTESANS, WHO WERE PERFECTLY LEGAL, COULD BE VIEWED AS SLAVES BY THIS LATTER DEFINITION.

...BUT WHAT IF SOMEONE HAD BEEN PUT UP AS COLLATERAL FOR A DEBT? THIS TOO WAS A KIND OF SLAVERY IN THE SEMBLANCE OF EMPLOYMENT.

IN THE CASES OF SLAVES WHO WERE TREATED LIKE LIVESTOCK, IT WAS OBVIOUS ENOUGH...

YES, BUT...

YOU SHOULD PROBABLY GET BACK SOON TOO SO YOU DON'T GET YELLED AT, RIGHT?

I'D BETTER GET GOING.

ON THE FACE OF IT, SLAVERY HAS BEEN WIPED OUT...

...BUT EVERYONE KNOWS IT STILL EXISTS UNDER OTHER NAMES TODAY.

I WONDER IF THE EMPRESS DOWAGER VISITING THE CLINIC...

...HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE THE OTHER DAY.

HMMM...

WITH THE EMPRESS DOWAGER'S SUPPORT ...

...PERHAPS MEDICINE AT THE INNER COURT WILL SEE SOME REFORMS OF ITS OWN.

IF SO, THERE'S NOTHING I'D LIKE MORE THAN TO GO EAVESDROP...

...SINCE IT FEELS LIKE I CAN'T DO ANYTHING RIGHT THESE DAYS.

GUESS I'LL HEAD BACK TOO...

SEE YOU LATER!

DO IT AGAIN.

ARE WE HAVING VISITORS?

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I LAST CLEANED AT THE JADE PALACE.

YES'M...

THIS MAKES THE THIRD TIME.

I'LL DO IT AGAIIIIN!

YOU CALL THAT CLEAN?!

SHE'S BEING SO MUCH MORE RIGOR-OUS THAN USUAL.

...BUT THE OTHER LADIES ARE GETTING CALLED OUT LEFT AND RIGHT TOO.

I THOUGHT SHE'D FINALLY TAKEN TO PICKING ON ME...

IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE YOUR LAST VISIT, EMPRESS DOWAGER ANSHI.

THE EMPRESS DOWAGER IN THE FLESH!

IF THE RUMORS SPEAK TRUE OF THE EMPRESS DOWAGER'S CHARACTER, IT MUST BE THE FORMER.

I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE.

IS THE EXCEPTION-ALLY WARY CONSORT GYOKUYO INFORMING THE EMPRESS DOWAGER OF HER PREGNANCY ...

...OUT OF TRUST?

OR OUT OF OBLIGA-TION?

BUT THIS IS AN AMICABLE ATMO-SPHERE.

EVEN THE SHY PRINCESS HAS WARMED UP TO HER TOTALLY.

YOU THERE, YOUNG LADY.

...HOW DOES SHE KNOW THAT?

YES, YOU ARE CORRECT, YOUR MAJESTY.

AM I RIGHT IN THINKING THAT YOU ARE THE MAID WHOSE EMPLOYMENT HERE WAS ARRANGED BY JINSHI?

HOH HOH HOH!

SO HER MAJESTY AND THAT TOUGH ATTENDANT ARE OLD PALS?

I HEARD ABOUT YOU FROM SUIREN. SHE TOLD ME THE MAID SHE'D FOUND TO BE UP TO THE TASK OF HER TUTELAGE HAD RETURNED TO THE INNER COURT.

SUIREN WAS MY LADY-IN-WAITING A LONG TIME AGO, YOU SEE.

YOUR MAJESTY, I DO APOL-OGIZE...

...BUT I THINK IT MAY BE TIME FOR THE PRINCESS'S NAP.

GLANCE

WHAT AN INCREDIBLY PERCEPTIVE WOMAN.

NOW, COME.

SIT DOWN.

SHE MAKES IT SEEM LIKE SHE'S SIMPLY...

...CONSORT GYOKUYO'S SLIGHTLY OLDER FRIEND RATHER THAN HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.

YOU...

I...

...SEEM TO HAVE A KNACK FOR SOLVING ALL KINDS OF PROBLEMS, FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD.

...JUST PICK AND CHOOSE FROM WHAT KNOWLEDGE I HAVE...

...AND PRESENT WHAT APPLIES TO A GIVEN SITUATION. NOTHING MORE.

I HOPE THAT DIDN'T COME ACROSS AS ME DISAGREEING WITH HER.

...BUT I BET PA WOULD'VE GOTTEN TO EVERY ONE OF THOSE SOLUTIONS IN HALF THE TIME.

SURE, I TOUCH ON THE TRUTH HERE AND THERE...

...NOR THE LEARNING OF MY FATHER.

BUT I HAVE NEITHER A WILD IMAGINA-TION...

GRRK

THAT'S WHY I INSIST ON A DISCLAIMER. THESE ARE THE WORDS I LIVE BY.

IT'S FINE TO USE ONLY WHAT YOU KNOW.

KLINK

YOU'LL HEAR NO QUIBBLE FROM ME.

THERE'S SOMETHING I WOULD LIKE YOU TO INVESTIGATE FOR ME.

I WISH TO KNOW...

...IF I CAST A CURSE ON THE LATE EMPEROR.

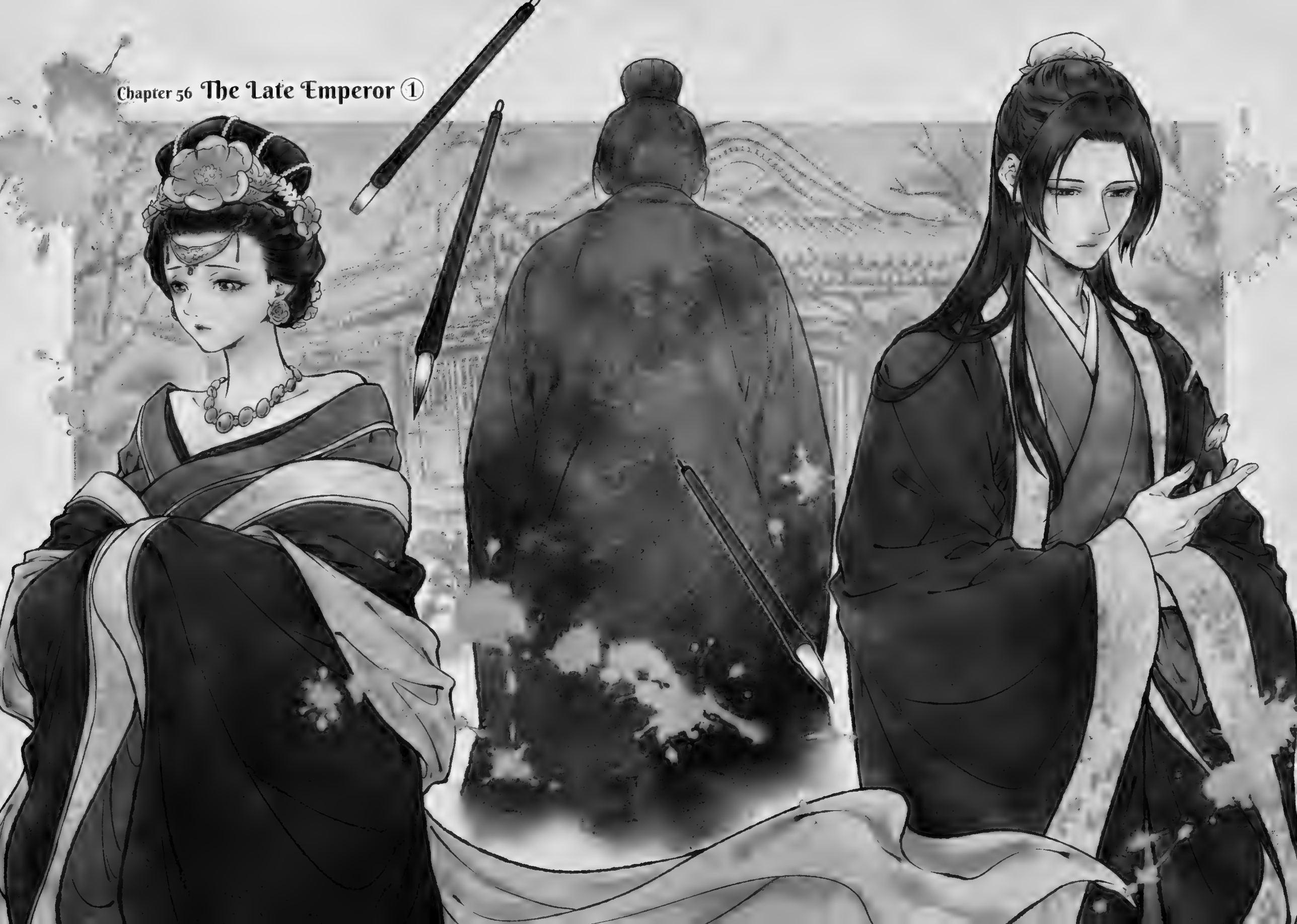
A CURSE ...?

Chapter 56

I SUPPOSE THAT'S ONE WAY OF LOOKING AT IT.

WOULD YOU MIND IF WE CONTINUE THIS CONVERSATION ELSEWHERE?

Chapter 56 The Late Emperor ①



I HAVEN'T HEARD A SINGLE GOOD THING ABOUT THE LATE EMPEROR.

"HIS TRAVESTY," THE FOOLISH RULER. THE PUPPET OF THE EMPRESS.

AT THE INNER COURT, HE WAS PROBABLY BEST KNOWN FOR HIS PREDILECTION FOR LITTLE GIRLS.

IT WAS COMMON FOR MEN TO TAKE YOUNG WIVES FOR POLITICAL REASONS OR IN REPAYMENT FOR A DEBT.

BUT WHILE THE LATE EMPEROR HAD A HAREM FULL OF NUBILE WOMEN...

...IT WAS CONSIS-TENTLY THE VERY YOUNGEST OF THEIR NUMBER HE WOULD BED, GIVEN HIS TASTES.

IN FACT, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WAS JUST TEN OR SO YEARS OLD...

...WHEN SHE GAVE BIRTH TO THE CURRENT EMPEROR.

AND THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN FORCED TO BECOME A EUNUCH TO ASSIST WITH THAT BIRTH...

...WAS NONE OTHER THAN MY UNFOR-TUNATE PA.

AND DESPITE THE GREAT SCAR THAT MARRED HER BELLY, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WENT ON TO GIVE BIRTH TO THE EMPEROR'S LITTLE BROTHER TOO.

PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THE SACRIFICE IT TOOK TO BRING HIM INTO THE WORLD...

...THE CURRENT EMPEROR GREW UP STRONG AND HEALTHY.

FAR PAST THE AGE TO BE CONSIDERED A GIRL.

AS I RECALL, THE BROTHER IS A YEAR OLDER THAN ME...

...AND THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WAS JUST SHY OF 30 WHEN SHE BORE HIM.

I COULD NEVER SAY THIS OUT LOUD...

...BUT SOMETHING HAS JUST OCCURRED TO ME.

IS THE EMPEROR'S LITTLE BROTHER TRULY THE CHILD OF THE LATE EMPEROR?

...THE EMPRESS DOWAGER ARRANGED FOR THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS TO ASSEMBLE IN THE GUISE OF A VERY FINE TEA PARTY...

A FEW DAYS LATER...

...IN THE AREA OF THE INNER COURT ...

...TYPICALLY RESERVED FOR THE EMPEROR, THE EMPRESS, AND THEIR CHILDREN TO RESIDE.

IF CONSORT GYOKUYO'S GOT THIS MUCH, THEN THE OTHER CONSORTS' LADIES-IN-WAITING ARE PROBABLY BRINGING EVEN MORE.

WE'VE BROUGHT SO MUCH THAT IT REQUIRES THREE EUNUCHS TO CARRY IT ALL.

TO THE WOMEN OF THE INNER COURT, TEA PARTIES ARE A SORT OF COMPETITION FOR SHOWING OFF.

WE CAN RELAX UNTIL THE TEA PARTY BEGINS.

CONSORT GYOKUYO IS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF HER PREGNANCY, SO SHE CONTINUES TO BE PRONE TO BOUTS OF SLEEPINESS.

EACH CONSORT WAS PROVIDED WITH...

...A COOL AND AIRY PRIVATE CHAMBER.

THERE'S EVEN CHILLED FRUIT FOR SNACKING.

I'M SURE SHE'S TRYING TO BE CONSIDERATE, BUT STILL...

UGH!

HMPH.

JUST WHAT IS SHE THINKING?

...BUT A FACE-TO-FACE EVENT LIKE THIS COULD INVITE TACTLESS QUESTIONS ALL THE SAME.

THE PREG-NANCY IS AN OPEN SECRET ...

...A PREGNANT WOMAN TO A TEA PARTY.

THEY'RE GETTING AT THE FACT THAT IT'S STRANGE TO INVITE...

BESIDES, CONSORT LIHUA IS NOBLE BY NATURE AS WELL AS BY BLOOD.

SHE DOESN'T MAKE A HABIT OF HUMILIATING HER RIVALS.

I DOUBT CONSORT LIHUA WOULD MAKE SUCH INQUIRIES FOR FEAR OF THE SAME QUESTIONS BEING DIRECTED AT HER, THOUGH.

AS FOR CON-SORT GYOKUYO ...

...IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR HER TO PICK A QUARREL WITH CONSORT LIHUA, WHO IS OF SUPERIOR BIRTH.

GOING BY HOW SHE WAS DRESSED DURING THE INCIDENT WITH XING...

THE TWO WOMEN AVOID CONFLICT BY HAVING NO CONTACT WITH EACH OTHER.

...SHE HERSELF IS LIKELY PREGNANT TOO.

THE FORMER FOOD TASTER MUST NOT BE AS PUSHY AS THE OTHERS.

...BUT AT THE BANQUET, SHE ONLY HAD HER HEAD LADY-IN-WAITING AT HER SIDE.

MEAN-WHILE, CONSORT LISHU...

...IS EASILY JERKED AROUND BY HER ATTEN-DANTS...

YOUR FOOD-TASTING SERVICES WON'T BE REQUIRED TODAY.

OUR LADY AND I SHOULD BE EATING THE SAME THINGS.

NOT SURE WHAT TO EXPECT FROM CONSORT LOULAN, ABOUT WHOM I HAVEN'T HEARD ANY RUMORS, CURIOUSLY ENOUGH...

...NOR THE HOSTESS OF THIS TEA PARTY, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER...

MAO-MAO.

ALL RIGHT.

IT'S ONE OF THOSE PARTIES, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

SO THE HEAD LADIES-IN-WAITING WILL BE EATING THE SAME FOOD AS THEIR CONSORTS AS A COMPROMISE.

BUT SHOULD WORSE COME TO WORST, THE QUESTION OF WHO IS AT FAULT WOULD ARISE.

THE CONSORTS REFRAIN FROM USING FOOD TASTERS HERE...

...TO SHOW THE EMPRESS DOWAGER THEY TRUST THAT WHAT SHE IS SERVING THEM IS NOT POISONED.

WHAT A HUGE BOTHER.

OKAY.

THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WOULD LIKE TO BORROW YOU.

BUT YOU DO HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

.....

DON'T TELL ME YET ANOTHER PERSON HAS COME TO YOU WITH THEIR PROBLEMS?

"OKAY"...?

BUT!

SLAM

WELL, IT'S FINE.

I'M GUESSING YOU CAN'T TELL ME ABOUT IT, IN ANY CASE.

YOU WOULD DO WELL TO AVOID BETRAYING MY LADY.

I'M GLAD WE UNDER-STAND EACH OTHER!

I'D LIKE TO STAY FRIENDS WITH YOU TOO!

CHEERY

UH-HUH.

...THE LAST THING I WANT IS TO HAVE YOU FOR AN ENEMY, LADY HONG-NIANG.

BDMP

CONSORT GYOKUYO'S LADIES REALLY ARE SOMETHING ELSE.

BBMP

THIS AREA SERVED AS THE INNER COURT PRIOR TO THE INNER COURT WE KNOW TODAY BEING BUILT.

IS THAT RIGHT?

SHE TOLD ME BEFORE I EVEN ASKED

THIS LADY WAS ATTENDING THE EMPRESS DOWAGER THE OTHER DAY TOO.

THE OLD INNER COURT...

...MUST'VE BEEN COMPRISED OF THESE SIX PALACES I CAN SEE, WHICH WOULD'VE HOUSED THE CONSORTS.

THE LONG BUILDINGS SURROUNDING THOSE WERE PROBABLY THE QUARTERS FOR OTHER COURT LADIES.

EVEN THE GRAVEL IN THE TRADI-TIONAL DRY LANDSCAPE GARDEN HAS BEEN RAKED NICE AND TIDY.

...BUT THEY MAKE A POINT OF KEEPING IT SPOTLESS. THERE'S NOT SO MUCH AS A SPECK OF DUST.

I DON'T SENSE ANYONE AROUND...

SHP

HERE WE ARE.

BETWEEN THE PALACES WE PASSED, HEADING STILL FARTHER BACK...

...UNTIL WE ARRIVED AT A LONG BUILDING WITH A CENTRAL CHAMBER SOMEWHAT BIGGER THAN THE REST.

CREAK

NOW THAT'S AN ODD SMELL.

FWOOSH

THIS PLACE HAS A CURIOUS AIR ABOUT IT.

I CAN TELL FROM A DISTANCE THAT EVERY-THING'S COVERED IN DUST.

THE FLOOR IS STRANGELY STAINED, AND EVEN THE WALLS HAVE A YELLOWISH CAST.

...FROM WHEN SHE WAS INSTALLED AS A LOW-RANKING CONSORT.

...TO BECOMING EMPRESS DURING THE RULE OF THE LATE EMPEROR'S PREDECES-SOR...

THESE ARE THE QUARTERS OF THE WOMAN WHO WENT FROM BEING A MAID...

WHAT IS THIS PLACE ...?

...AND ALSO WHERE HE PASSED FROM THIS LIFE.

IT WAS HERE THAT THE LATE EMPEROR WAS RAISED...

...SPENT A LOT OF TIME COOPED UP HERE WITH HIS MOTHER TOWARD THE END OF HIS LIFE.

AS THE STORY WOULD HAVE IT, OUR LATE RULER...

...AS IF FOLLOWING HER IN DEATH.

AFTER THE THEN EMPRESS DOWAGER PASSED, HE DREW HIS LAST BREATH IN THIS VERY ROOM...

THE LATE EMPEROR MUST HAVE BEEN FAINT OF HEART.

SHUTTING HIMSELF UP IN THIS ROOM SO HE COULD CLING TO HIS MEMORIES ...

...THAT SHE HAD CURSED HIM...

...BY WISHING HIM DEAD, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.

...AND THOUGH NOT AS LONG AS HERS, SO WAS THE LATE EMPEROR, HER SON.

...THE LATE EMPRESS DOWAGER WAS BLESSED WITH A LONG LIFE...

UNLIKE THE PEASANTS AMONG THEIR SUBJECTS, WHO WERE THOUGHT WIZENED ELDERS PAST THE AGE OF 60...

BUT SHE CLAIMED...

...I TOLD LADY ANSHI THAT THERE WERE NO SUCH THINGS AS CURSES.

WHEN THE LATE EMPEROR PASSED...

THE LATE EMPEROR'S BODY WAS ENSHRINED IN THE MAUSOLEUM FOR A YEAR.

IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE OF THIS CURSE?

PEOPLE BEING MISTAKEN FOR DEAD AND COMING BACK TO LIFE ISN'T ENTIRELY UNHEARD OF...

...THERE WOULD'VE BEEN LITTLE REASON TO HASTEN THE CONSTRUCTION WITH HIS BODY ALREADY ENSHRINED.

PLUS, EVEN IF HIS TOMB HADN'T BEEN FINISHED WHILE HE WAS ALIVE...

THE LATE EMPEROR LOOKED MUCH AS HE HAD IN LIFE...

...AND EVEN HIS MAJESTY WAS GIVEN TO THINK HIS FATHER MIGHT HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH A WELL-CRAFTED DOLL.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, THE EMPEROR AND MY LADY WENT TO RETRIEVE THE BODY...

...IN PREPARA-TION FOR BURIAL.

SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT HIS BODY HADN'T DECAYED?

BUT THEY WERE TOLD IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS THAT IT WAS THE LATE EMPEROR'S BODY.

HOWEVER, WHEN THE PAIR HAD GONE TO RETRIEVE THE PREVIOUS EMPRESS DOWAGER'S BODY, IT HAD BEEN IN AN UNSPEAKABLE STATE.

AND THEY WERE TOLD THAT WAS TO BE EXPECTED.

YES. THE MAUSOLEUM IS A COOL BUILDING, EVEN IN THE SUMMER.

A CORPSE THAT DOESN'T IS AN ANOMALY, TO BE SURE.

UNLESS A BODY IS FROZEN ...

...IT WILL ROT, BECOME INFESTED WITH INSECTS, AND SHRIVEL AWAY WHEN LEFT ALONE.

NOW I UNDER-STAND.

WE ALL EVEN-TUALLY RETURN TO THE EARTH.

OUR BREEDING MAY DIFFER, BUT I CAN'T IMAGINE WE'RE MADE OF DIFFERENT STUFF.

THE PEOPLE OF THE COURT ARE NO EXCEPTION.

THE LATE EMPEROR PASSED SIX YEARS AGO.

HIS BODY HAS LONG SINCE BEEN INTERRED, SO THIS IS PROBABLY THE LAST PLACE THAT HOLDS ANY OF HIS MEMORIES.

THIS BUILDING IS SOON TO BE TORN DOWN.

WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO LOOK INTO THIS BEFORE THAT TIME COMES.

PARDON MY INSOLENCE, BUT MAY I ENTER THE CHAMBER?

...HMM.

UNLESS THIS MYSTERY IS SOLVED BEFORE THE DEMOLITION, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WILL LIKELY NOT BE ABLE TO REST EASY.

VERY WELL. I SHALL ASK PER-MISSION.

I'M NOT SURE IF SUIREN HAD SOME-THING TO DO WITH IT...

...BUT JINSHI AND GAO SHUN WILL APPARENTLY BE THERE TO BEAR WITNESS.

PHEW.

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE BEEN BACK TO STAY OVER AT JINSHI'S.

IT SEEMS I'LL BE GOING BACK TO THAT ROOM TOMORROW.

LEAVE TO ENTER MUST BE GIVEN BY THE EMPEROR HIMSELF, I'M TOLD.

BUT I ASSUME HIS MAJESTY GRANTS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING THE EMPRESS DOWAGER REQUESTS OF HIM.

I BET SHE'S BEEN GOING EASY ON ME THUS FAR.

THE THOUGHT OF HONGNIANG'S REACTION UPON MY RETURN TO THE JADE PALACE FRIGHTENS ME RIGHT NOW.

I CAN'T IMAGINE HONGNIANG, WHOSE JOB AS HEAD LADY-IN-WAITING IS TO PROTECT CONSORT GYOKUYO...

...THINKS TOO KINDLY OF A WOMAN OF THE COURT WHO FREQUENTS OTHER PALACES YET REMAINS ALIGNED WITH NONE OF THEM.

OF COURSE, I'D NEVER DREAM OF DOING ANYTHING TO HARM CONSORT GYOKUYO.

BUT NEITHER DO I WANT TO ASSIST HER IN GAINING ADVANTAGE OVER THE OTHER CONSORTS.

SOME-TIMES...

...EVEN I'M UNSURE OF WHOSE SIDE I'M ON.

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU WERE LAST HERE. FEEL FREE TO RELAX TONIGHT.

JINSHI'S PERSONAL ATTENDANT **SUIREN**

YES.

ARE YOU DONE GETTING DRESSED?

PLEASE SLEEP HERE TONIGHT.

...BUT IT'S WELL-MADE AND PRETTILY DECO-RATED.

A SIMPLE BED.

SOMEONE ELSE IS OCCUPYING THE ROOM I USED BEFORE...

...SO I'LL BE STAYING WITH SUIREN ...

...IN HER TWO ADJOINING ROOMS LOCATED IN A CORNER OF JINSHI'S RESIDENCE.

I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SLEEP A WINK FROM WORRY IF YOU WERE TO SPEND THE NIGHT THERE, OF ALL PLACES.

I WOULDN'T MIND SLEEPING ON THE COUCH.

IF YOU'RE IN THE MOOD TO READ TOO, GO AHEAD AND GRAB A BOOK FROM THE BACK ROOM.

THANK YOU.

WHAT A LUXURY TO BE ABLE TO READ BY CANDLE-LIGHT.

BOOKS ARE PRECIOUS. I SHOULDN'T WASTE THIS VALUABLE OPPOR-TUNITY.

SHUT

...

SHE MUST BE HOLDING ON TO HER INNER CHILD IF SHE'S READING THIS KIND OF THING.

SHP

...SUIREN AND I SEEM TO HAVE RATHER DIFFERENT TASTES.

A WICKER TRUNK EMBROIDERED WITH GOLDEN THREAD...

IT LOOKS OLD, BUT IT'S BEEN LOVINGLY PAINTED WITH PERSIMMON DYE.

JUMP

DOES THAT BOX PIQUE YOUR CURIOSITY?

OH, I KNOW, I KNOW.

FRET NOT.

I'D NEVER DREAM OF STEALING ANYTHING, MADAM.

はPOP

カ!

CHILDREN'S TOYS?

THESE WERE MASTER JINSHI'S FAVORITES.

HE HAD EVER SO MANY TOYS BUT ONLY PLAYED WITH THOSE HE LIKED BEST...

...SO WE WOULD SECRETLY HIDE THEM.

WHEN ONE GROWS ATTACHED TO SOMETHING, THEY CEASE TO LOOK AT ANYTHING ELSE.

HE WASN'T BORN INTO A POSITION THAT WOULD ALLOW HIM TO DO THAT.

WHY DID YOU TAKE THEM AWAY?

BUT WHENEVER WE HID A TOY AWAY...

...HE WOULD CRY INCONSOL-ABLY.

WE NEEDED HIM TO GROW UP, WHETHER HE LIKED IT OR NOT.

THAT WAS HIS MOTHER'S WISH FOR HIM.

GAO SHUN WOULD GO TO GREAT PAINS TO BRING HIM ONE NEW TOY AFTER ANOTHER...

...BUT NOTHING WOULD CHEER HIM UP.

...HE MUST'VE PLAYED WITH IT CONSTANTLY.

FOR IT TO TURN THIS DARK FROM HANDS THAT NEVER KNEW DIRT...

THIS DOLL OF CARVED WOOD HAS GAINED A DEEP LUSTER FROM ALL THE HANDLING.

PERHAPS THE CURIOUSLY CHILDISH JINSHI I'VE GRADUALLY BEEN SEEING MORE OF...

...IS ONE FACET OF HIS TRUE NATURE.

I'VE HEARD THAT GROWING UP IN AN OPPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENT CAN HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE HEART.

AND YET, EVERYONE AROUND HIM INSISTS ON TREATING HIM LIKE THE BE-ALL AND END-ALL OF BEAUTIFUL EUNUCHS, WHICH MAKES THIS EVEN MORE ABSURD TO CONSIDER.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MASTER JINSHI?

TELL ME...

BEAR GALL

BEZOAR

...BECAUSE HE GETS ME RARE MEDICINES AND INGREDIENTS.

HE'S A GOOD BOSS.

SHAKE

SHAKE

ANYTHING YOU'D CARE TO ADD TO THAT STATEMENT?

...THIS IS...

FLIP

WHAT'S THAT SHEET OF PAPER?

SO THAT'S WHERE THIS OLD THING GOT TO!

ぽの

FWIP

OH MY!

...HM?

WHAT'S THAT REACTION ABOUT?

I WAS TOLD TO THROW IT AWAY AND EVERYTHING, BUT HERE IT IS.

MAY I...

...TOUCH THIS STONE?

"...

AS YOU WISH.

I WONDER WHERE HE FOUND THAT.

THE YOUNG MASTER WAS NEVER ONE TO COLLECT ROCKS.

YOU DON'T NEED TO PICK IT UP WITH A TOWEL. IT'S JUST A PEBBLE.

DID YOU TAKE THIS FROM HIM RIGHT AWAY?

GOOD THING YOU DID.

ROCKS PICKED UP OFF THE GROUND ARE QUITE DIRTY, YOU KNOW.

OH YES.

THIS STONE IS TOXIC.

.....

HOW DID HE PICK UP SUCH A THING IN THE FIRST PLACE?

THAT'S WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.

HOW COULD THAT BE?!

...SIR JINSHI WAS BROUGHT TO THE INNER COURT WHEN HE WAS A CHILD?

PER-HAPS...

I CAN'T YET SAY FOR SURE.

BUT WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THE STONE?

...YES, ON A FEW OCCA-SIONS.

I HAVE A THEORY...

...BUT I HAVE NO PROOF.

ALL WILL BECOME CLEAR TOMORROW, THOUGH.

WOULD YOU MIND WAITING UNTIL THEN?

Chapter 57

I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF THIS SINCE THINGS GET AWKWARD WHEN MY HUNCHES ARE WRONG...

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JUST A LITTLE WALKING'S KICKING UP ALL THIS DUST.

BUT I KNOW THAT MOLD ALONE ISN'T TO BLAME FOR THIS STRANGE ODOR.

AN ASSORT-MENT OF BRUSHES WITH FLAT TIPS...

JUST AS I THOUGHT ...

...HE PAINTED ME JUST ONCE.

DID THE LATE EMPEROR TAKE UP PAINTING AS A HOBBY?

?

JINSHI'S FINGER IS TWITCHING.

HE TOLD ME IT WAS OUR SECRET BECAUSE IT WOULD BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM IF ANYONE ELSE FOUND OUT.

HE APPEARS SERENE ON THE OUTSIDE, BUT I THINK HE MUST BE SHAKEN.

IT'S A TIC OF HIS I'VE ONLY RECENTLY NOTICED.

IS THIS WHERE HE PAINTED?

I DON'T KNOW ALL THAT MUCH ABOUT THE LATE EMPEROR ...

...NOR DO I CARE TO KNOW MUCH MORE THAN I ALREADY DO...

...BUT I NEED MORE INFORMATION IF I'M TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS "CURSE."

IF ANYONE KNOWS, IT WOULD BE HIM.

HOWEVER, ONCE THE LATE EMPEROR MADE A HABIT OF COMING HERE, HE WAS ALWAYS ATTENDED BY THE SAME SERVANT.

WE CANNOT SAY.

I SHALL GO FIND HIM, THEN.

WOULD YOU SUMMON HIM AT ONCE?

GO AHEAD.

MAY I TOUCH THESE BRUSHES?

I BELIEVE HE WORKS HERE STILL...

AND THEY HAVE THAT DISTINCTIVE SMELL.

SNIFF SNIFF

THE BRISTLES ARE MUCH STIFFER THAN I IMAGINED.

...AND SMEARS WHERE SOMEONE TRIED DESPERATELY TO CLEAN THEM UP.

THERE ARE PIECES OF SOMETHING RESEMBLING BOILED SWEETS ALL OVER THE FLOOR...

...THIS WALL.

SHP

AND THE MESSY TRAIL LEADS TO...

IT HAS SPRING, AS IF IT WERE COVERED IN THICK PAPER.

SOMETHING WAS PAINTED ON THE SURFACE TO STRENGTHEN IT.

BEND

?!

I HAVE A ROUGH IDEA OF WHAT THE "CURSE" IS NOW...

...BUT I THINK I MIGHT BE ABLE TO PUZZLE OUT ONE MORE RANDOM THING FROM ALL THIS...

THIS ROOM APPEARS SIMPLE...

...HAS YELLOWED WITH AGE.

...MOST LIKELY BECAUSE ITS ALREADY PLAIN, UNORNAMENTED WALLPAPER...

I'VE BROUGHT HIM.

YOU...

HE'S QUITE OLD.

WAS THIS OLD MAN REALLY ENTRUSTED WITH THE CARE...

...OF SUCH AN IMPORTANT PERSON'S QUARTERS UNTIL JUST A FEW YEARS AGO?

I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME-THING.

HE CANNOT SPEAK.

THIS MAN WAS ONCE A GOVERN-MENT-OWNED BOND SERVANT.

UNFOR-TUNATELY, MANY WERE HORRIBLY ABUSED.

...NOT UNLIKE COUR-TESANS WHO WORK OFF A TERM OF SERVICE.

IF THEY WORKED HARD ENOUGH, THEY WERE ABLE TO EARN THEIR FREEDOM ...

BOND SERVANTS WERE ESSEN-TIALLY STATE SLAVES.

I SEE.

SO THAT'S HOW IT IS.

I'M SURE A FAIR FEW HAVE NONVERBAL INDIVIDUALS IN THEIR EMPLOY.

...SO SOMEONE WHO CAN'T SPEAK WOULD MAKE AN IDEAL SERVANT.

NOBLES OF THE COURT LIVE THEIR LIVES UNDER THE WATCHFUL GAZES OF OTHERS...

WHEN YOU CLEANED THIS ROOM, DID YOU HAPPEN TO COME ACROSS ANY PAINTINGS?

NO RE-SPONSE.

I THINK SOMETHING HAPPENED HERE.

...NO, THAT'S NOT IT.

DOES HE NOT WANT TO TALK TO A YOUNG GIRL LIKE ME?

GLANCE

HE'S HIDING SOME-THING.

IS THERE SOME-THING IN THE WALL?

MAY I PEEL OFF THIS WALL-PAPER?

!!

TOUCH

TOUCH

...BUT I CAN'T LEAVE THIS ALONE.

THOSE EYES ARE PLEADING WITH ME TO STOP...

THIS BUILDING IS SOON TO BE DEMOLISHED ANYWAY.

DO WHAT YOU MUST IF YOU THINK IT WILL HELP US DISCOVER THE TRUTH.

WOULD THAT BE ALL RIGHT?

SKRRK

PLAP

PLAP

NO WONDER IT WAS SO PLIANT.

ああ

ああああ

ああ

ああ

ああ

WHAT IN THE WORLD ...?

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MATERIALS OR THE TECHNIQUE.

IT'S AS IF THE PAINTING IS APPEALING TO THE VIEWER AND TRYING TO CONVEY SOME HIDDEN MESSAGE.

THIS WORK HAS THE POWER TO MAKE ME FEEL THAT WAY.

I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE LATE EMPEROR'S NATURE.

BUT I THINK HE LIVED AND DIED UNABLE MAKE USE OF HIS TRUE GIFTS...

...JUST TO STAND ATOP THE NATION.

IT REMINDS ME OF THE PAINTING I SAW LAST NIGHT.

THAT'S THE STONE I FOUND IN JINSHI'S WICKER TRUNK.

...THIS PAINTING MUST HAVE ORIGINALLY BEEN A FAR MORE VIBRANT YELLOW.

THOUGH IT HAS DEGRADED FROM BEING COVERED UP WITH WALL-PAPER...

THE PAINT HE USED ... ...COMBINED A PIGMENT WITH A LIQUID.

AS THE NAME WOULD SUGGEST, IT IS MADE BY CRUSHING ORPIMENT STONES.

THIS PARTICULAR PIGMENT IS CALLED ORPIMENT YELLOW.

ORPIMENT IS A MINERAL THAT CONTAINS ARSENIC, AND IT'S JUST AS TOXIC.

AND ARSENIC IS KNOWN TO SLOW DECAY.

BUT THE FACT THAT A YOUNG JINSHI PICKED UP AN ORPIMENT STONE AT THE INNER COURT...

...ALONG WITH THE WARPED TEXTURE OF THE BRUSHES STREWN AROUND THIS ROOM...

...GAVE RISE TO ANOTHER POSSI-BILITY.

AT FIRST, I THOUGHT THE LATE EMPEROR MIGHT'VE BEEN UN-WITTINGLY EXPOSED TO ORPIMENT...

...FROM WHERE IT'D BEEN USED TO DECORATE WALLPAPER OR SOME SUCH.

BY THE TIME OF HIS PASSING, IT HAD LIKELY CIRCULATED THROUGHOUT HIS BODY.

THE LATE EMPEROR MUST HAVE GRADUALLY ABSORBED THE ARSENIC...

...OVER THE LONG PERIODS OF TIME HE SPENT IN THIS ROOM.

AT BEST, THEY COULD SIMPLY CONFIRM THAT IT WASN'T BEING MIXED INTO HIS FOOD.

...NOR WERE THEY IN A POSITION TO TELL THE EMPEROR WHAT HE COULD AND COULD NOT DO.

BUT THEY HAD NO IDEA HOW HE WAS COMING INTO CONTACT WITH IT...

I'M SURE HIS PHYSICIANS WERE AWARE OF THE POSSIBILITY AS WELL.

...LEAVING THE MUTE SLAVE THE CARETAKER OF THE CHAMBER...

AND SO, THE EMPEROR— THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE LAND— HAVING ALREADY BEEN DUBBED A FOOL...

...TOOK TO PAINTING IN SECRET...

"WHAT KIND OF MAN OF STATURE INDULGES IN SUCH A VULGAR HOBBY?"

AT LEAST THAT'S HOW EVERYONE WOULD'VE SEEN IT, AND HE MUST'VE KNOWN.

THERE MUST BE MORE PAINTINGS BENEATH THIS ONE.

THE WALL STILL YIELDS TO THE TOUCH.

BEND

WHAT I REALLY WANT TO KNOW...

...IS HOW THE LATE EMPEROR ACQUIRED ALL HIS PAINTING IMPLE-MENTS.

THESE CANDY-LIKE FLECKS ALL OVER THE FLOOR...

...ARE PROBABLY RESIN OR GLUE MADE FROM BOILED-DOWN ANIMAL HIDES AND THE LIKE.

SUCH SUBSTANCES IMPROVE THE ADHESION OF PAINT TO PAPER.

...AS WELL AS MINERALS FOR MAKING PIGMENTS...

...AREN'T ALL TOO EASILY OBTAINABLE.

...RESIN AND PAPER LARGE ENOUGH TO BE USED FOR WALLPAPER...

WHILE PAINT BRUSHES CAN BE MANAGED WITH ANIMAL HAIR...

...TO SPECIALLY SUPPLY EVERYTHING HE WOULD NEED TO PAINT.

...SOMEONE WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY...

THAT MEANS ...

...THEY MUST HAVE SEEMED TO HIM A GREAT LOOMING SHADOW FROM WHICH HE COULD NOT ESCAPE.

AT THE SAME TIME...

THE LATE EMPEROR HAD NO INTEREST IN GROWN WOMEN.

THE WOMAN IN THIS PAINTING KNEW...

...THAT HER OWN CHILD WAS UNFIT TO BE EMPEROR.

HOW IRONIC, THEN...

...THAT THE LAST THING SUCH A FIERCE MOTHER BESTOWED UPON HER BELOVED SON...

...WAS THIS PLACE AND THE TOOLS WITH WHICH TO PAINT.

THAT'S WHY SHE GATHERED POWER TO HER HAND, BECOMING NIGH AN EMPRESS HERSELF...

...AND DID ALL SHE COULD TO PROTECT HER CHILD ON THE THRONE THAT HE'D FALLEN INTO...

...BY SHEER CHANCE.

THIS OLD MAN MAY HAVE BEEN THE ONE TO RECEIVE THE MATERIALS...

...FROM THE THEN EMPRESS DOWAGER AND GIVE THEM TO THE LATE EMPEROR.

NEITHER WOULD'VE KNOWN ABOUT THE POISON LURKING WITHIN.

SHE SEEMS ALMOST TO BE POSING QUESTIONS TO SOMEONE UP THERE BEYOND THE VAST BLUE SKY...

PERHAPS LEARNING THE TRUTH HAS MADE HER SENTI-MENTAL...

AND THAT IS AS MUCH AS I CAN TELL YOU.

The Apothecary Diaries

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THE PALACE GIRL NAMED MAOMAO HAS GIVEN ME THE ANSWERS I SOUGHT AND THEN SOME.

SHE MAY HAVE EVEN TOLD ME MORE THAN I STRICTLY NEEDED OR WANTED TO KNOW.

OHH ... ... HOW I SEETHE WITH RAGE RIGHT NOW.

...MAY BE ONE OF THE GIRLS IN THIS PAINTING.

OR PERHAPS I WASN'T EVEN INCLUDED.

...I...

THE PAINTING MAY HAVE FADED, BUT HER LARGER-THAN-LIFE PRESENCE REMAINS AS STRONG AS EVER.

IN THE END, I WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A PASSING INTEREST TO HIM.

...IS THE ONLY REASON I HAVE THIS LIFE AS THE EMPRESS DOWAGER.

THE SCAR I HAVE HERE NOW...

I HAD MY FIRST BLOOD EARLIER THAN MOST GIRLS MY AGE.

MY FATHER WAS A CIVIL SERVANT, AND MY MOTHER, HIS MISTRESS.

DESPITE THAT, I STILL HAD CHILDLIKE FEATURES.

SO MY FATHER DECIDED I COULD BE A CONVENIENT TOOL.

THERE WERE SOME WHO SYMPA-THIZED WITH THE YOUNG GIRL...

...WHO FELL INTO THE CLUTCHES OF THE LATE EMPEROR BY CHANCE AND BECAME WITH CHILD.

BUT I ALREADY KNEW ALL ABOUT THE EMPEROR'S TASTES.

I'M SURE THERE WAS SUCH A GIRL.

SHE WAS UNAWARE OF OUR FATHER'S INTENTIONS AND SIMPLY AWAITED WITH GREAT EAGERNESS THE VISIT OF THE EMPEROR SHE SO ADMIRED.

MY OLDER HALF-SISTER WAS INSTALLED AS A MID-RANKING CONSORT, AND I WAS SENT TO THE INNER COURT AS HER LADY-IN-WAITING.

BUT THE HANDSOME EMPEROR WAS CLEARLY UNINTERESTED IN THIS MEETING...

...AND HAD THE AIR OF A MAN WHO HAD BEEN COERCED INTO THE VISIT BY HIS EUNUCHS.

OUR MOMENT CAME SOONER THAN EXPECTED.

WHEN SHE MOVED TO TOUCH HIM...

BUT MY HALF-SISTER WAS BROUGHT UP LIKE A PRINCESS...

...SO SHE DIDN'T PICK UP ON IT.

...THE NEXT THING I KNEW, SHE WAS ON THE FLOOR.

IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THIS FEEBLE MAN WHO TREMBLED IN FEAR BEFORE A DAZED CONSORT OF MIDDLING RANK ON THE GROUND...

...WAS THE MOST POWERFUL PERSON IN ALL THE LAND.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

...OR APOLOGIZED TO HIS MAJESTY FOR HER DISCOURTESY.

AS A LADY-IN-WAITING, I SHOULD HAVE GONE TO MY MISTRESS'S SIDE TO COMFORT HER...

BUT IN THAT MOMENT, I CAUGHT HIS MAJESTY'S EYE JUST AS SURELY AS HE CAUGHT MINE...

I, AN OVERLY AMBITIOUS GIRL OF TEN...

AS THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS GREW AND GREW...

...THREE NEW AREAS WERE BUILT TO HOUSE THEM.

THEREAFTER, SEVERAL YOUNG GIRLS ENTRUSTED WITH A SIMILAR MISSION CAME TO THE INNER COURT.

DURING THIS PERIOD, I REGULARLY FOUND MYSELF IN MORTAL DANGER.

I WAS LUCKY TO GIVE BIRTH TO A BOY...

...AND FOR THE EMPRESS TO ACCEPT HIM AS HER GRAND-SON.

THESE WERE CONSTRUCTED AROUND THE SAME TIME THE LATE EMPEROR ASCENDED THE THRONE. THEY ARE NOW PART OF WHAT WE CALL THE SOUTHERN GROUNDS.

THERE ONCE WAS A CONSORT WHO BORE A GIRL...

...BUT THE LATE EMPEROR WOULDN'T ACKNOWL-EDGE THE CHILD...

...AND BANISHED THE COURT PHYSICIAN WHO WAS THOUGHT TO BE THE CHILD'S FATHER.

...WAS CASTRATED FOR THAT SOLE PURPOSE, AND THE THOUGHT OF THAT PAINS ME GREATLY.

THE MAN WHO UNDER-TOOK THE PROCE-DURE ON MY BELLY...

BUT THE INCIDENT WITH THE BANISHED PHYSICIAN CHANGED THAT.

PHYSICIANS AT THE INNER COURT WERE THE ONLY MEN EXEMPT FROM BEING CASTRATED AT THE TIME.

THE LATE EMPEROR STOPPED COMING TO VISIT ME.

TIME PASSED, AND NO LONGER DID I LOOK LIKE A YOUNG GIRL.

...THAT PATHETIC EXCUSE OF A MAN WHO COULD ONLY HOLD A CON-VERSATION WITH LITTLE GIRLS.

HE EXISTED TO BE THE PUPPET OF THE EMPRESS, NOTHING MORE...

I COULD NOT LET SUCH A WRETCH FORGET ME.

THERE ARE SOME WHO SUSPECT THAT MY SECOND CHILD HAS A DIFFERENT FATHER...

...BUT THAT IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE.

ALL THOSE GIRLS HE'D LAID HIS HANDS ON...

IN MY BED...

...I SHOWED HIM THE GREAT SCAR ON MY BELLY...

...AND SPAT POISONOUS CURSES INTO HIS EAR OVER AND OVER, WHILE HE COWERED AND BEGGED FOR FORGIVENESS.

NO AMOUNT OF TORMENT COULD EVER COMPARE TO THE NUMBER OF SCARS HE'D LEFT ON THEM, BUT OH, HOW I MEANT TO TRY.

I WANTED TO LEAVE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON HIM, MORE PROFOUND THAN EVEN HIS MOTHER, THE GREAT EMPRESS.

SOON AFTER, THE LATE EMPEROR BROKE DOWN AND RETREATED INTO THIS CHAMBER.

I HAVE NO WISH TO PURSUE THE QUESTION OF WHO WAS TO BLAME.

...BUT HIS MOTHER THE EMPRESS AND GUILELESS LITTLE GIRLS.

...HAD EYES FOR ANY-THING...

BUT ULTIMATELY, WHILE SHUT UP IN THIS ROOM, I DOUBT THAT MAN...

HOW DID THAT PAINTING LOOK AGAIN?

HE SAID IT WAS OUR SECRET AS HE CARESSED THE PAPER WITH HIS BRUSH...

...HIS DEMEANOR CALM AND PEACEFUL.

HE PAINTED ME JUST THE ONCE.

I DIDN'T NEED THE LATE EMPEROR ANYMORE...

...JUST AS HE DIDN'T NEED ME.

I TREASURED THAT PAINTING AT FIRST...

...BUT I EVENTUALLY TOLD MY LADY-IN-WAITING TO THROW IT AWAY.

EVEN IF HE'S THOUGHT TO BE THE PRODUCT OF ADULTERY...

...OR TAKEN FOR ANOTHER WOMAN'S BABE...

I WAS QUICK TO DECIDE...

...WHEN I BELIEVED MY CHILD MIGHT BE IN DANGER.

...HE'LL ALWAYS BE DEAR TO ME.

YES.

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN OVER TEN YEARS AGO NOW.

ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO...

...THAT MAN CAME TO SEE US, DIDN'T HE?

I REMEMBER PICKING UP SOMETHING LIKE THIS BACK THEN.

THE EMPRESS WAS IMMEDIATELY AT HIS ELBOW WHEN HE MADE HIS SUDDEN APPEARANCE...

...AND TOOK HIM BACK WITH HER, SOOTHING HER DARLING ONLY SON ALL THE WAY.

THIS IS APPARENTLY KNOWN AS "ORPIMENT."

SUIREN FINALLY GAVE IT BACK TO ME THIS MORNING.

...THAT HE SEEMED TO FIXATE ON PLAYING WITH.

...TO TAKE AWAY ANYTHING ...

A VERY LONG TIME AGO, I INSTRUCTED SUIREN...

...I AVOIDED MEETING HIS SEARCHING GAZES THAT SEEMED TO BE TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF MY MOOD.

NOT REALIZING HOW CRUEL IT WAS...

I THINK I'VE SEEN HIS WORK ONCE BEFORE.

BECAUSE OF THAT, HE MANAGED TO MATURE FASTER THAN MOST...

...WHILE REMAINING A CHILD AT HEART.

I'M SURE I PICKED UP THAT STONE...

...BECAUSE IT REMINDED ME OF THAT PAINTING.

...DONE IN SOFT COLORS.

THE PICTURE WAS OF A YOUNG GIRL...

IT'S JUST A COINCI-DENCE.

YOU USED TO LIKE WEARING THIS COLOR, DIDN'T YOU?

I THOUGHT I TOLD HER TO GET RID OF IT...

THAT'S THE ONLY REASON I WORE THE COLOR SO MUCH.

...HAP-PENED, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, TO BE YELLOW.

I COME FROM A PLACE THAT THRIVES ON THE TRADE OF TURMERIC, AND THE CLOTHING I BROUGHT FROM HOME...

IS THE WOMAN IN THAT PAINTING ...

...TRULY THE LATE EMPRESS DOWAGER?

WHAT WAS HE TRYING TO TELL ME BACK THEN? I WONDER...

WHO CAN SAY?

HMM.

AND NOW WE'LL NEVER KNOW.

I HAVE NO IDEA.

I CHOSE NOT TO.

!!

YOU SEEM TO HAVE YOUR EYE ON A MOST INTERESTING YOUNG LADY.

ANYHOW, NEVER MIND THAT.

...HAPPENS TO BE VERY USEFUL.

...SHE JUST...

THAT SHE IS. HOW-EVER...

BUT THAT'S NOT ALL THERE IS TO IT. THAT MUCH I KNOW...

...YOU'D BE WISE TO HIDE AWAY YOUR FAVORITE...

...BECAUSE I'VE WATCHED YOU GROW UP OVER THE YEARS.

...BEFORE SOMEONE HIDES HER FROM YOU.

The Apothecary Diaries

CONGRATS!

WE'RE GETTING AN ANIME!

Thanks for reading
The Apothecary Diaries, Volume 11!

When drawing the manga, I always try to imagine how the characters would move if they were animated. I wonder how it'll look when they're moving in an actual anime! I wonder if Nanao's composition and my drawings will be used? ✧₊ I'm really looking forward to seeing it! Everyone get hyped!!

From the artist,
Nekokurage

ORIGINAL STORY
Itsuki Nanao

ORIGINAL CHARACTER DESIGN
Natsu Hyuuga
Touco Shino

My editor, you, the readers, and everyone else involved!

ASSISTANTS
Kai Kazaha
Asaha
Hamano
Izumi
Shimura

ありがとうございました！

The Apothecary Diaries...

...is getting an ANIME!!

...looking forward to it!

SUPER DUPER!!...

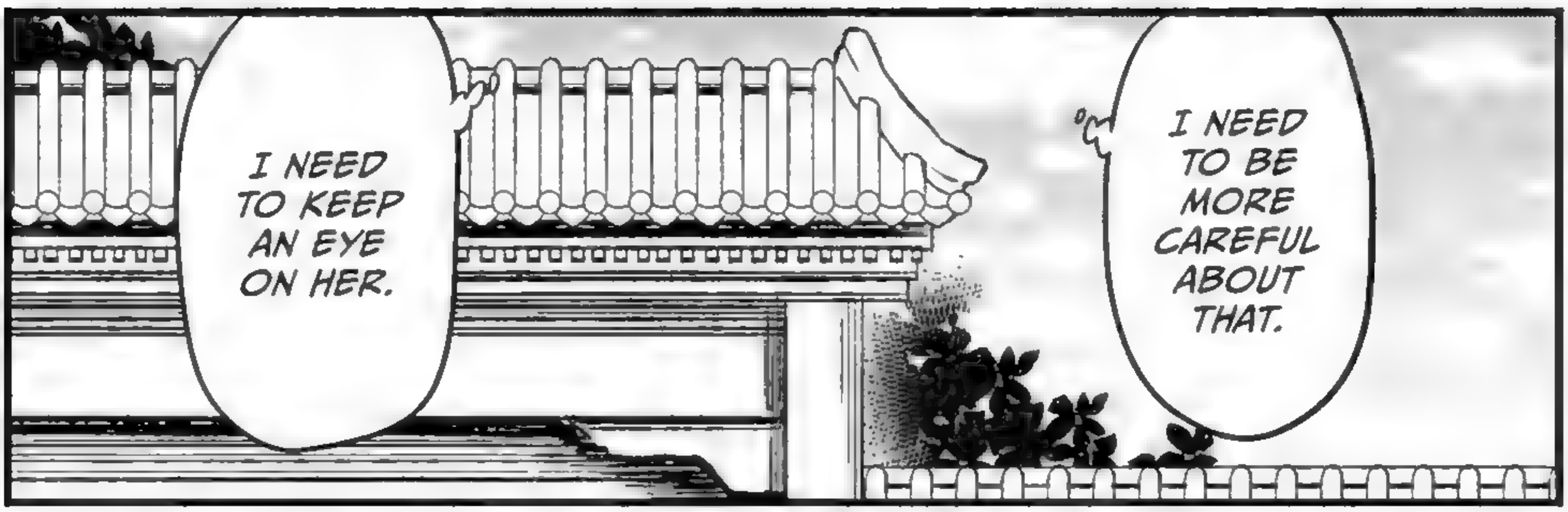
Author: Natsu Hyuuga
Light novel illustrator: Touco Shino
Manga Artist: Nekokurage
The editor
You, the readers

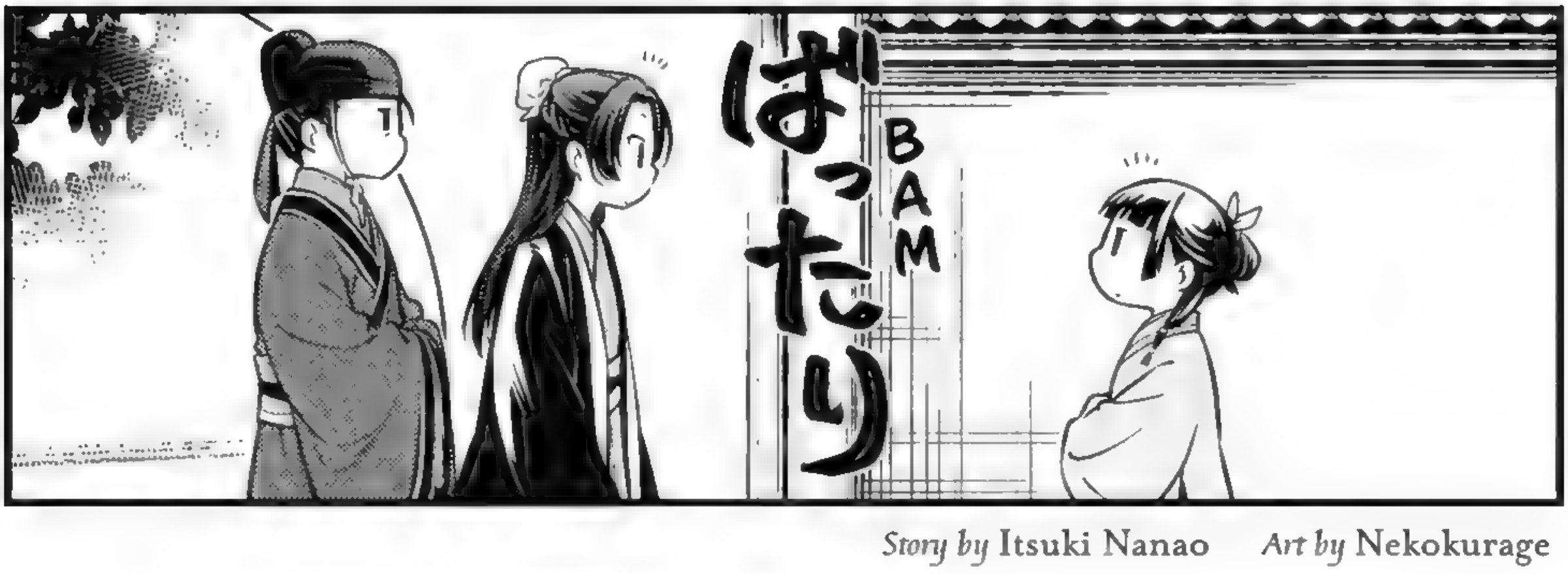
Thank you always!

Itsuki Nanao,
the compiler

INNER COURT ETIQUETTE

CHAP-
TER
55
...WHEN-EVER SOMEONE OF HIGHER STANDING WALKS BY.
ONE OF THE VERY FIRST THINGS WE'RE TAUGHT IS TO KNEEL AND BOW OUR HEADS...





Story by Itsuki Nanao *Art by* Nekokurage

?!

SHP

FLAW-LESS.

IT IS AN HONOR TO SEE YOU THIS DAY, SIR JINSHI.

GRRRR...

WHY DID HE STOP WALKING?

HE CAN'T POSSIBLY EXPECT ME TO DO MORE THAN THIS.

SUUU STAAARU

WHY IS SHE SUDDENLY GROVELING ON THE GROUND?

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

INCH

...I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO HERE.

SCOOT

INCH

SCOOT

THIS EVE, WE SHALL BE TELLING 13 STORIES THAT WILL CHILL YOU TO THE BONE.

YOU'LL BE COMING WITH ME TONIGHT.

SUMMER GHOST STORIES...

...AND LATER...

Next Volume Preview

I WAS INVITED TO GO HUNTING ...

DEAR ME!

WHOEVER MIGHT YOU WISH TO "TAKE BACK"?

...SO I'LL BE "TAKING HER BACK" FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS.

Continue reading for a sneak peek at Volume 12 of *The Apothecary Diaries*, coming soon!

...MAOMAO AND COMPANY HEAD NORTH ON A HUNTING TRIP...

The Apothecary Diaries

The Apothecary Diaries

THIS MUST BE THE SOURCE OF THE RUSHING WATER I HEARD BEFORE.

RUSSSH

WHAT A BREATH-TAKING SIGHT TO BEHOLD.

...SO YOU CAN DRINK THAT AFTER.

I'VE BROUGHT WATER FROM THE KITCHENS...

LET'S GET YOU COOLED OFF.

?!

WHAT WAS THAT?

THWAK

NO

YANK

10

ヴ!! THWAK

THIS SEEMS TO BE A WHOLLY UNFORESEEN SITUATION, BUT HE'S KEEPING A COOL HEAD, TO MY SURPRISE.

A FIRE LANCE ...?

SORRY IF THIS GIVES YOU A START!

ヴ!! GRAB

THWAK

HUH ??

LEAP
はっ

The Apothecary Diaries

The Apothecary Diaries

Volume 11

Story by
Natsu Hyuuga

Art by
Nekokurage

Compiled by
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THE APOTHECARY DIARIES Volume 11
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First published in Japan as *Kusuriya no hitorigoto* in 2023 by SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD.
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ISBN (ebook): 978-1-64609-730-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022917189

Published by Square Enix Manga & Books, a division of SQUARE ENIX, INC.
999 N. Pacific Coast Highway, 3rd Floor
El Segundo, CA 90245, USA

SQUARE ENIX
MANGA & BOOKS
square-enix-books.com